

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations (in alphabetical order) are contingent on new or amended statutes and regulations, annual appropriations by the Alaska legislature, and available staff. Agencies should assign particularly high priority to implementing all of the following four recommendations: Coordinated Management, Enforcement, Information and Education, and Monitoring. Other recommendations specific to each management unit are included in Chapter 3.

COOPERATIVE AGREEMENTS

DNR should pursue cooperative agreements with the Bureau of Land Management, the Lake and Peninsula Borough, other land managers, and private land managers that address mutually agreed-upon levels of development, coordinated data collection and monitoring, trespass problems, and other management issues related to the planning area.

Cooperative agreements for management of the lower and middle Nushagak River are especially important because of multiple ownership and relatively high levels of use. DNR should pursue cooperative agreements with the Bristol Bay Native Corporation, Choggiung Ltd., Ekwo Natives Ltd., Koliganek Natives Ltd., and Stuyahok Ltd. for management of this area. Bristol Bay Coastal Resource Service Area (BCRSA) should assist in coordinating this process.

Choggiung Ltd. actively monitors the use of its lands on the lower Nushagak River (Management Unit 1). DNR, ADF&G, and BCRSA should work with Choggiung Ltd. to identify information for Choggiung Ltd. to collect about levels and impacts of use.

COORDINATED MANAGEMENT

ADF&G, the Board of Fisheries, the Board of Game, BCRSA, other appropriate agencies, and DNR should work closely to further develop a coordinated management framework for the Nushagak and Mulchatna area. The Board of Fisheries, the Board of Game, and ADF&G should provide DNR with direction for land management consistent with their established goals. Board goals should address topics such as allocation of fish and wildlife among user groups and how these goals affect land management. ADF&G, the Board of Fisheries, the Board of Game, DNR, and the Division of Governmental Coordination should work closely together to analyze and clarify the legal authorities of each agency with respect to the allocation of resources which either directly or indirectly affect the use and availability of fish and wildlife resources.

DENYING PERMITS AND LEASES

The planning team recommends that applicants with a past record of serious fish and game violations (such as same-day airborne hunting, wanton waste of fish or game, or overharvesting) be denied permits and leases to use state lands for permanent or temporary facilities associated with commercial sport hunting or sportfishing.

ENFORCEMENT

DNR's current ability to enforce regulations in the area currently requires costly and time-consuming civil litigation. DNR should continue to budget money for field presence and draft legislation to amend AS 38.05 to provide authority to issue citations and fines, and to confiscate property.

INFORMATION AND EDUCATION

DNR, ADF&G, and BBCRSA should develop an information brochure that highlights land status, 17(b) easements, and trespass problems in the planning area. DNR, ADF&G, and BBCRSA should coordinate the development of information and education efforts with adjacent landowners.

DNR will publish an easement atlas for the Bristol Bay area that includes land in the Nushagak and Mulchatna drainages. The atlas identifies Native, state, and federal land, navigable waters, 17(b) easements, and Native allotments.

MONITORING

DNR, ADF&G, and BBCRSA should place a high priority on developing a program to collect information on environmental impacts, overall use, and impacts of use in the planning area. Three general types of impacts that should be monitored include effects on the quality of experience, impacts on fisheries resources, and impacts on wildlife resources. Field surveys are the preferred method of data collection. Other options for collecting information include a) require operators who receive leases or permits to submit an annual report detailing their previous year activities; b) develop a system that requires all commercial operators to register when using state land for any period of time.

Monitoring Impacts on the Experiences of Users

Impacts on the experiences of users, such as a feeling of overcrowding, are currently not observed and analyzed in a systematic way. However, such intangible values may be an important part of the overall experience for many. To manage resources effectively, managers need better information on the patterns and impacts of uses in the planning area. A monitoring program should be developed to regularly assess the amount of use in different parts of the planning area, gauge users' preferences using accepted research techniques, analyze the relationship between use levels and impact levels, further define user experience, and establish management objectives for levels

of encounters and other measures of impacts. Information from the monitoring program should be used to periodically reevaluate and refine plan policies, including guidelines on amounts of development and management of floating facilities.

Monitoring Impacts of Use on Resident Fish Resources

During the last decade, fishing use has increased in the area. Information on salmon stocks is relatively abundant, but little information is available on the impact of increased angling effort on resident fish stocks.

The Board of Fisheries is responsible for conservation and development of fisheries resources. ADF&G provides information to the board to make management decisions.

ADF&G should establish a freshwater fisheries monitoring program. One component of the program should be biological sampling of resident species. Information on size and age composition, seasonal distribution, and migration patterns should be gathered. River systems where biological sampling of resident species is particularly important include the Chilikadrotna, Stuyahok, Koktuli, and King Salmon. Sampling of rainbow trout is particularly important on the main stems of the Nushagak and Mulchatna rivers. A second component of the program should include creel surveys conducted periodically to estimate fishing effort and catch. Creel surveys would be particularly useful at the mouths of the Stuyahok and Koktuli rivers and in the stretch of the upper Nushagak River between Big Bend and Harris Creek.

Assessing Impacts of Motorboat Use

ADF&G should conduct studies to evaluate effects of jet boat use on fish habitats.

Monitoring Impacts of Hunting Use on Availability of Moose Resources

ADF&G should assess the impacts of increased sport hunting use and commercial recreational development on the availability of moose resources for subsistence use in management units 15, 16, 17, 18, and 19.

These units, which include the lower Mulchatna, Koktuli, and Stuyahok drainages, have the greatest potential for increased conflict between fall subsistence and sport hunting uses. These drainages provide traditional hunting areas for local residents. During the last decade, sport hunting use associated with floating and drop-off air taxi activity has increased rapidly on these rivers. Increased moose harvest pressure in these areas has resulted in game regulations that vary the harvest season by user groups.

The Board of Game is responsible for resource allocation among user groups. DNR is responsible for managing land that supports wildlife resources and uses. The issue of competition for wildlife resources is addressed by the Board of Game regulatory process.

This plan allows the development of commercial recreation facilities, including those for sport hunting in some of these units. An increase in moose hunting effort associated with commercial facilities in these areas may result in greater competition among user groups. This issue is most likely to arise in management units 15, 16, 17, 18, and 19.

MULTIPLE YEAR PERMITS

DNR should develop regulations that allow DNR to issue permits not to exceed 2 years in the Nushagak-Mulchatna planning area. When developing these regulations, DNR should clarify its policy about equipment removal between field seasons.

OFF-ROAD VEHICLES (ORVs)

The Board of Game should prohibit the use of off-road vehicles (ORVs) for the purpose of hunting in the portion of the planning area that includes ADF&G's Game Management Subunit 17B (management units 7 through 25). Much of this subunit has tundra that provides easy accessibility for ORVs. Game Management Subunit 17b has not supported significant densities of ORV use in the past. This portion of the planning area contains important wildlife habitats that have been subjected to little motorized disturbance in the past. Increased hunting efficiency and improved access associated with ORVs is likely to result in increased harvest and displacement of wildlife from these areas. Additionally, proliferation of use and increase in trails caused by intensive human use on tundra areas is not compatible with providing a high quality hunting or other wildlife use experience.

DNR, in cooperation with ADF&G, should investigate areas of increasing and/or intensive use to determine if significant vegetation disturbance is occurring. If so, DNR should establish guidelines to minimize ORV impacts in problem areas.

PERMIT APPLICATION QUESTIONNAIRE FOR AGENCY REVIEW

DNR should continue to develop a land use questionnaire for permit applicants to detail information about the proposed permit use. The purpose of the questionnaire is to improve the quality of review by agencies and groups reviewing the proposed use, and to begin developing a base of information about use in the area.

DNR should consider including questions that address fuel storage, food service, physical location of associated activities, human waste disposal, solid waste disposal, gray water disposal, fresh water supply, number of improvements, type of commercial activity, number of clients, number of employees, associated uses (such as horses, snowmachines, ORVs, and boats), opinion about use levels in the area, indication of the amount of other uses (such as by locals and non-locals), location of any known archaeological sites, trail use, and means of access.

PERMIT FEES

DNR should reconsider the fee structure for permits on state land to increase fees to at least cover administrative costs for processing permits and managing the Nushagak and Mulchatna area. DNR should ask the legislature to appropriate these revenues through program receipts for management of the area, or establish a budget for management of the area.

PERMITS FOR COMMERCIAL OPERATORS

DNR should consider developing a system in which all commercial operators using state land for any period of time are required to have a permit or to register.

TRESPASS STRUCTURES

DNR should request the legislature for authority to seek the redress of trespass structures, focusing first on primitive units and second, on semi-primitive units. All trespass structures in primitive and semi-primitive units should be removed. Trespass structures are not consistent with the management intent for these units. Trespass structures in semi-developed units should be considered as potential public use cabins, which is consistent with management intent.